

For immediate release
April 11, 2006

RIO GRANDE FLOOD CONTROL LEVEE IMPROVEMENTS, WATER QUALITY, AND NATURE-BASED TOURISM IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE ON AGENDA FOR APRIL 19 PUBLIC MEETING

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has scheduled a public meeting of its Lower Rio Grande Citizens' Forum (LRGCF) on April 19, 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. at the University of Texas-Brownsville, 3rd Floor Conference Center, Science & Engineering Technology Building. The purpose of the LRGCF is to facilitate the exchange of information between the USIBWC and members of the public about Commission activities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

USIBWC Engineer Raymundo Aguirre will present the latest information on plans to improve levees in the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project. Work is currently focused on levee improvements in the areas of Hidalgo and Mission, Texas. Construction of the Hidalgo Hike and Bike Trail levee is already underway while design and environmental studies for other levee improvements are advancing. The USIBWC is implementing a multi-year plan to raise and rehabilitate Rio Grande flood control levees after the agency's studies pointed to structural deficiencies or areas where the levees could be overtopped during a major flood.

Acting Commissioner Carlos Marin will give an update on the effort to rehabilitate the Morillo Drain, a binational water quality project located in Mexico that conveys saline irrigation return flows to the Gulf of Mexico, thereby reducing saline discharges to the Rio Grande. United States funding is currently available to construct improvements along key segments of the Drain. The USIBWC is currently working with Mexico to develop a work plan for these improvements.

In another water quality project, the Citizens' Forum will hear a report from Laura de la Garza on the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan (ACWPP), which has the goal of reducing by 20% the nutrient loading in the Arroyo over the next ten years. The ACWPP has been developed by the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership, which has involved numerous stakeholders over the last three years.

The plan proposed to achieve reductions of pollutants by various means including encouraging the voluntary adoption of best management practices on irrigated cropland fields such as nutrient management and land leveling; supporting new and improved wastewater treatment facilities; controlling municipal stormwater runoff; conserving and constructing wetlands; and reducing erosion.

In other business, Ken Merritt of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge will discuss management plans for the Refuge in support of nature-based tourism in the Valley. The Refuge, which offers 45,000 acres of land open to the public, provides Valley residents and visitors with a variety of outdoor recreation experiences. Nature-based tourism is the fastest growing segment of the national tourism industry, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is widely recognized as one of the leaders in providing and promoting outstanding nature tourism opportunities. Wildlife-dependent uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and education, when compatible with the mission of the Refuge System, are legitimate and appropriate uses.

A complete meeting agenda follows. Members of the public who would like more information can contact the USIBWC's Lower Rio Grande Project Office at 956-565-3150 or the Public Affairs Office at sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov.

For more information:

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LOWER RIO GRANDE CITIZENS' FORUM

Wednesday, April 19, 2006

4:00 - 6:00 P.M.

3rd Floor Conference Center, Science & Engineering Tech. Building*
University of Texas - Brownsville
Brownsville, Texas

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions - Rick Reyes, USIBWC, Citizens' Forum Co-Chair
- Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan - Laura de la Garza, Arroyo Colorado Watershed Coordinator
- Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge: Managing Public Use, the World Birding Center, and Supporting Nature-based Tourism in the Valley - Ken Merritt, Project Leader, South Texas Refuge Complex, US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Status of USIBWC Levee Rehabilitation Project - Dr. Raymundo Aguirre, Engineer, USIBWC
- Morillo Drain Rehabilitation Project - Carlos Marin, Acting Commissioner, USIBWC
- Public Comment
- Board Discussion, Suggested Future Agenda Items

If you have a disability that you wish to self-identify confidentially that requires accommodation, please advise us ahead of time. For more information, call 956-565-3150.

***Directions:** From Expressway 83, exit on International Blvd (heading south). Turn left on Ridgely. Go past 18th and 21st Streets. S& ET Building will be on the right side of Ridgely Road.